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The Real

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II.

THE name of M. Paul Sabatier has of late become entwined as it were in the public mind around that of St. Francis as of one who had thrown much new light on the history of the Seraphic Patriarch. For several years past M. Sabatier has been working among the half-buried cities of early Franciscan literature like an industrious historical mole turning out with amazing rapidity literary cameos of considerable appearance and some value. (20) Whatever may be the ultimate literary value of M. Sabatier's documentary "discoveries," one thing is certain, that the enthusiastic and energetic work of the French critic has given an immense impetus to the present movement of Franciscan research. Indeed, had M. Sabatier not written his "Life" of St. Francis it is more than probable that several subsequent works on the same subject would never have seen the light seeing that they are little more than a popularization of the hypotheses of M. Sa-

(20) Among them are the following: *Vie de S. François d'Assise*, which forms the subject of the present article; *Speculum Perfectionis seu S. Francisci Assisiensis Legenda Antiquissima: Tractatus de Indulgentia S. Mariae de Portiuncula; Floretum S. Francisci Assisiensis; un Nouveau chapitre de la vie de S. François; Description du Manuscrit Franciscain de Leignitz; Regula Antiqua Fratrum et sororum de poenitentia; De l'authenticité de la Legende de S. François; S. Francisci legendae veteris fragmenta. Paris: Libraire Fischbacher.*

batier. (21) In his "Life" M. Sabatier has given expression to all the neo-Protestant Franciscan sympathies. It may not, therefore, be amiss to try and form a correct judgment as to the literary and religious aspect of the French critic's writings especially as it is probable that he will soon visit the United States.

M. Sabatier himself has told us (22) the simple story of what it was that first led him to study St. Francis and to devote his life to him. He had been to Assisi like other tourists to see the place. By his side in the omnibus that took him back to the station sat a free-thinking old doctor of the Garibaldian school who began to talk about St. Francis. At first the old doctor was sarcastic, asking M. Sabatier if he had procured any relics or wonder-working articles connected with the Saint, that, he averred, being the principal object of many visitors to the shrine of St. Francis. "No," said M. Sabatier, "I have been looking at Giotto's work chiefly." It had hardly struck the French critic that St. Francis was the main interest of Assisi; still less that he was not a more or less mythical personage of no particular value to the world at large. Then to his surprise the old free-thinker burst out into the most extraordinary language of enthusiasm over St. Francis, speaking of him as one of the Fathers of Italy and as one of the greatest reformers the world had ever known. The old doctor hardly thought that he was raising up a new biographer to St. Francis, but this conversation was the turning point in M. Sabatier's life. His attention was arrested. "Was this Francis of Assisi

(21) Such, for example, as "Francis, the Little Poor Man of Assisi," by James Adderley. (London, Edw. Arnold, 1901), and "The Sons of St. Francis," by Anne MacDonell. (London, J. M. Dent & Co., 1903).

(22) In a recent conference before the Dante Society of Milan.

truly all this man said? Has such a man really walked the earth? Let me go and see." This was about fifteen years ago.

M. Sabatier went, saw, and was conquered. Wishing in turn to lead others captive he decided to write a book on St. Francis, and in due course put forth his "*Vie de St. Francois*"—a volume that, crowned by the French Academy, has passed through some twenty-five editions. (23) That the literary worth of M. Sabatier's book should have met with recognition at the hands of the Academy is not surprising. The manner in which the eminent critic relates the life of St. Francis is inimitable and charming beyond compare. He can paint a picture or tell a story in a phrase. What is even more difficult he knows how to command your attention and sustain your interest to the end. It is less easy to understand how the life of a saint could in our day have met with greater literary success than almost any other book in the last decade. Twenty-five editions would be nothing extraordinary for a "psychological" novel, but for a work of hagiography it is a great deal. For though we are eager enough to find heroes nowadays and to worship them they are not of the canonized order. Nor does the science of the saints hold a prominent place on the list of branches which engage the minds of present day students. How then to account for the success of M. Sabatier's book? The answer is not far to seek. M. Sabatier's hagiography is not of the ordinary kind he is not a priest, not even a Catholic; and he has applied to the study of St. Francis all the methods of the "Higher Criticism."

(23) *Vie de S. François d'Assise*, par Paul Sabatier, Paris, 1894. We are quoting throughout from the English translation of Louise Seymour Houghton, published by Chas. Scribner's Sons, New York, 1899.

We have said that M. Sabatier is not a Catholic. To what particular private brand of Protestantism he may belong we do not pretend to know. He tells us that he is a "Protestant by birth not otherwise." (24) Be this as it may his work is the very incarnation of Protestantism, being a systematic exposition, a continuous defence, and a constant panegyric of that false theory which seeks to "enthroned individual conscience as the judge of last resort" (p. 260). This principle of private judgment we have been assured (25) has saved the world from "the despotic and soul stupefying Sacerdotalism of the Romanists"—which is a polemic manner of describing the external authority of the Church which Catholics hold as their supreme criterion and rule of certitude. The very corner stone then of Protestantism is its denial of this external authority. Prove that there exists an external authority in matters religious and by that proof you disprove Protestantism. Hence if there be one thing more than another that to use a somewhat vulgar though expressive phrase, stinks in the nostrils of M. Sabatier, that one thing is Papal Supremacy. Nor is this surprising. For does not the acceptance of this fundamental principle of Christianity imply submission, obedience, surrender of private judgment, annihilation of self in matters of faith, even collapse and subversion of all national, schismatical or heretical Churches? And is not M. Sabatier the champion of those "who preach in the name of the inward voice" (p. 72). Anyone who has read the recent work of M. Sabatier's master, Harnack, on the essence of

(24) It is so stated in the *Corriere della Sera* of Milan. Aug. 12-13, 1902.

(25) By the late Prof. Blackie, *Natural History of Atheism*, p. 184.

Christianity (26) will easily realize that M. Sabatier's "Life" of St. Francis is a most cleverly devised apology for that amalgam of creeds which is known as "Liberal Protestantism"—of those, that is, who reject what they call supernatural religion, to wit, the whole system of divine revelation and particularly the Divinity of Christ. Obstinately closing their eyes to the plainest evidence of the Divine origin and character of Christianity, these "Liberal Protestants" stultify reason by calling themselves Rationalists. Although Rationalism is but the logical issue and outcome of Protestantism, we are none the less surprised to find so many prominent clergymen of the Anglican Church among M. Sabatier's adherents. Anglicanism is comprehensive and elastic enough but we should scarcely have thought that it could be stretched so far as to include among its ministers those who as consistent followers of M. Sabatier are bound to blot out from their minds altogether the idea of the supernatural. Or may it be that these worthy parsons, many of whom have the honor of our Lord at stake and really venerate St. Francis, do not realize that the object in seeking to "rationalize" the Saint is nothing less than a covert attempt to dethrone the Son of God—to whose Divinity St. Francis remains a living witness in the face of false criticism and its allies.

But to return to M. Sabatier we believe that he is a Strasburger, that he went through a course of theology in Strasburg and exercised there for a time the functions of a "pastor." It was but natural therefore to expect that as M. Sabatier the pastor had preached the Gospel, M. Sabatier the biographer would treat St. Francis—

(26) *Das Wesen des Christentums*, von Adolf Harnack. Fünfte Auflage. Leipzig. Hinrichs, 1902. An English translation by Thomas Bailey Saunders, entitled "What Is Christianity?" is published by Putnam's, New York.

that he would put every critical study at the beck of his theological ideas. And so he does.

Finding that the St. Francis of history was the contradiction of all his preconceived theological ideas, there were two courses open to him; to take St. Francis as he stood and to abandon his ideas or to repaint the portrait of St. Francis according to those ideas. He chose the latter course. Hence his book is not a real biography; it is a thesis. But it is not the first history *ad probandum*, to use the ancient formula, which has been written of late years at the expense of St. Francis. We have had the Salvation Army attempt to transform St. Francis into a mediæval staff-captain (27)—an attempt which even so thoughtful a writer as Sir Walter Besant took seriously. (28) But Sir Walter Besant was by profession a writer of fiction; M. Sabatier, being a student of history, knows better than to imagine that St. Francis' "scheme of salvation" consisted simply in an appeal to "come to Jesus, etc.," like that of the Salvation Army. Nor is M. Sabatier inconsequent enough like Gebhard (29) to place St. Francis between Arnold of Brescia and Frederick II, as one working with the same intent as the tribune and the despot. Neither does M. Sabatier subscribe to the theory of Thode, which makes St. Francis a harbinger of the so-called Reformation. (30) M. Sabatier knows better than to suppose that St. Francis, even in

(27) *Brother Francis; or, Less than the Least*, by "Staff-Captain" Douglas, of the Salvation Army, with an introduction by "General" Booth. "Red-Hot Library" Series.

(28) "The Work of the Salvation Army," by Sir Walter Besant, *Contemporary Review*, Dec., 1897.

(29) *Italie Mystique*.

(30) *Franz von Assisi und die Anfänge der Kunst der Renaissance in Italien*. Berlin, 1885.

the highest flights of his vivid Italian imagination, ever supposed that men of sense would try to reform branches of the Church by uprooting the tree altogether. He clearly states (p. xvii) that St. Francis' attitude towards the Church "was that of filial obedience." Yet this is only a shield wherewith to hide a new assault of a more delicate nature. By a "conscientious criticism of history" combined with a "deeper insight" into the philosophy of things—a comparative study of religion—St. Francis is "rationalized." What does that mean? It means that having been despoiled of everything supernatural and reduced to something merely natural and not very orthodox, St. Francis becomes the precursor of religious subjectivism (p. 335), wishing only to obey a certain undefinable being or idea of some sort (p. 236). He stands, that is, for a popular religion strange to all dogmatics having its roots in a purely subjective affection and preaches a personal imitation of Christ in direct contrast to the hierarchical principles of the Roman Church. Just because the spirit and purpose of St. Francis were really anti-Roman and anti-organizational, violence was done him both living and dead by the Roman Curia in order to stifle the germ of individual and irresponsible mysticism that was the essence of his life and ideal. Like "the meek Galilean who preached the religion of a personal revelation without ceremonial or dogmatic law," so too St. Francis "triumphed only on condition of being considered and of permitting his words of spirit and life to be confiscated by a church essentially dogmatic and sacerdotal" (XVIII). Such in outline is M. Sabatier's thesis. It is a bad one and betrays and tyrannizes him throughout nearly five hundred pages.

At the outset we have no difficulty in believing M. Sabatier's assertion that he "sat for a time at the feet of

Renan." Both belong to the same school—that school which arrogating to itself in the name of science the monopoly of criticism, proceeds in the name of criticism to erect as a dogma the exclusion of the supernatural. For the "scientific" temper of our times, in one respect so excellent, in another little else than a modern form of superstition, dislikes the idea of divine "interference." "It is very interesting to note," says a modern psychologist, in one of Mr. Howells' stories, with a scientific smile, "how corrupting anything supernatural or mystical is." Acting on this criterion the "higher criticism" would free the world of the supernatural as of so much corruption. Of course it requires no more than a moment's reflection to convince one's self how unscientific and "tendential" such a subjective method of proceeding is, since it has against it alike the fundamental laws of history no less than the rules of sound logic. Moreover the life of any saint treated in such a fashion must necessarily be restricted by limits which sound criticism condemns. As to M. Sabatier's biography of St. Francis it has been justly said (31) that it is with regard to the Saint and the order he founded exactly what the "Life of Jesus" by Renan was with regard to our Lord and the beginning of Christianity—an endeavor to explain everything by natural causes or in other words a study imbued with the most absolute rationalism. (32) M. Renan

(31) By an anonymous contribution to the *Franciscan Herald* for Dec., 1902, to which article the present writer begs to acknowledge his indebtedness for several quotations and references.

(32) The Italian translators of M. Sabatier's book, Profs. Ghidiglia and Pontani, praise the French critic for having "stripped St. Francis of the supernatural, etc.," see page viii of the Italian translation (Rome: Loescher. 1896). And the names of those whom M. Sabatier has collected in his train in Italy stand for all that is most—"Liberal."

had in his famous book striven while professing the most reverent admiration for our Lord to take away every supernatural characteristic from Himself and from His work just as M. Sabatier whilst proclaiming his love for the *Poverello* has endeavored to take from him his character of Saint.

M. Sabatier of course affirms (p. xxxiii) that he is impartial, and that he wishes to judge from facts, but never have facts been so made to give way before gratuitous supposition, random conjecture and ambiguous explanation than when M. Sabatier sets to work to prove what he wants to be proven. As M. Sabatier's attitude takes its full significance where he treats of the Stigmata, it is interesting to note how he handles the subject. He devotes Chapter XVII, a very short one, to the miracle. After describing minutely and poetically the forest and rocks of Alverna, he endeavors, by subtle psychological analysis, to emphasize St. Francis' spiritual state when he retired to the mountain. He represents the Saint as having lived for years in closest union with our Lord, so that he could say with St. Paul: "It is no more I that live, but Christ liveth in me." (33) This is true, "Francis lived at the foot of the Cross," as Blessed Angela of Foligno puts it. (34) The Saint is shown to us on Mount Alverna as even more than ordinarily absorbed by his ardent desire to suffer for and with Christ—passing his days in the forest in meditation, reading the Gospel over and over again, always pausing at the story of the Passion. Moreover, the "vision of the Crucified One took the fuller possession of his faculties as the day

(33) *Gal.*, II, 20.

(34) See Le Monnier's "History of St. Francis," p. 398. London: Kegan Paul, 1894.

of the Elevation of the Holy Cross drew near." Having thus, as it were, enumerated all the *extenuating* circumstances of the miracle, if we may so speak, M. Sabatier briefly describes the apparition of the Seraph and abruptly brings the chapter to a close (p. 296) with these words: "Stirred to the very depths of his being he was anxiously seeking the meaning of it all when he perceived on his body the stigmata of the Crucified." He adds (35) that the "*psychological agreement between the external circumstances,*" to wit, the conditions by which St. Francis was surrounded at the time, "*to the event is so close that an invention of this character would be as inexplicable as the fact itself.*"

Thus he rejects Renan's insinuation that the stigmatization had been either a pious fraud or an invention of Brother Elias and does not hesitate to declare his belief that the stigmata were real. But this conclusion though more reverent and much cleverer than that of Renan, is quite as negative. For, like his master, what Sabatier gives with one hand he takes away with the other. Thus while admitting the stigmata to be a fact he destroys all idea of it being a miracle by reducing the miraculous to the "unknowable." This he does on the *a priori* assumption that we know everything and that among other items of knowledge we possess this viz., that there can be no direct intervention of the first cause, *i. e.*, God, in certain special cases, and that He cannot alter or suspend the laws of nature at His will. Of course as Canon Knox-Little remarks: "(36) no *real* believer in God can well doubt that, whilst He conducts the affairs of His own world in a way so orderly and

(35) Appendix I, p. 435.

(36) "St. Francis of Assisi," Appendix i., p. 318.

regulated that *we* are able to observe the fact, still—if He be God and since He *is* God—there must be occasions when He may see fit to conduct them in a manner, not indeed disorderly or unregulated, but such as *we* are not accustomed to.” This is not however the place to discuss the possibility of miracles, nor is it necessary to do so, but, as Cardinal Newman says, (37) “there is the grossest inconsistency on the very face of the matter for anyone so to strain out the gnat and swallow the camel as to profess what is inconceivable yet to protest against what is purely within the limits of intelligent hypothesis.” But M. Sabatier does not stop here. He asserts (p. 433) that the idea of a miracle is an immoral one because “if God intervenes thus irregularly in the affairs of men, the latter can hardly do otherwise than seek to become courtiers who expect all things of the sovereign’s *favor*.” Canon Knox-Little’s comment on this proposition is worth quoting: “This excellent writer decides *against* the thing being miraculous on the astonishing ground that belief in miracles weakens manliness and morality, for that if God ‘intervenes in this way in the affairs of men, He is guilty of favoritism, and His servants become mere courtiers looking for favors!’ This grotesque argument would carry us at once into endless difficulties. Still Sabatier’s dislike to miracles and his absurd argument against a miracle, make his adherence to the truth of the stigmata as a *fact* all the more valuable from my point of view. He believes in matters which pass our ordinary experience. He agrees as to the existence of the ‘unheard of,’ ‘the unexpected,’ etc., in life, provided that ‘this new notion (!) of the *supernatural*’ be excluded. We need not fight about words. If it comforts the (scientific) mind to acknowledge the

(37) *Essay on Miracles*.

'unheard-of,' 'the unexpected,' etc., in life, a believer in God may well be satisfied that a real step is taken towards truth, towards what *he* calls miracle and towards the very *old* 'notion' of the supernatural. . . . My own belief is that the more carefully the evidence is examined and due weight given to the probability the more clearly the 'miracle' (as I should call it) or the 'unusual fact' (as M. Paul Sabatier would call it) is satisfactorily established." (38)

M. Sabatier's treatment of the stigmata shows plainly how under the enthusiastic admirer of the Saint the rationalistic critic remains—a fact which goes far to explain how he so completely misunderstands the most sublime aspect as it seems to us—of the Saint's physiognomy—that whole grand series of magnificent facts and stupendous truths that concern the supernatural side of St. Francis life. True M. Sabatier has a Chapter (XI) on "The Inner Man and Wonder-Working" but withal not even a hint is given us of that inner devotional life (39) which was the true source of all the Saint's virtues. Nothing for example is said as to the place which the mystery of the Incarnation held in the life of St. Francis, yet into few souls if any has so deeply entered the full meaning of that tremendous mystery. No one better than he has appreciated our Lord's words. "God so loved the world as to give His only begotten Son." (Jo. III, 16). The Infant of Bethlehem seemed to him the love of God Himself made visible. (40) The Incar-

(38) Appendix to his excellent work already quoted, p. 315.

(39) *Studebat in interiorem hominem recondere Jesum Christum. Tres Socii*, p. 22.

(40) In his own poetic language he says:

"*D'amore, non de carne tu nacesti
Humanato amore, che ne saluasse.*"

Amor. de caritate Strophe 27.

nation was to St. Francis as to St. Paul the great mystery of love in which God and man meet: to him the soft light of the Incarnation lay all over the Earth. His biographer who knew him well says of him "Jesus was all things to him, Jesus was his heart, Jesus was on his lips, Jesus was in his eyes, in his ears, in his hands. He was in his whole being." (41) It is true. He had consequently not only a deep and filial love for the Mother of our Redeemer but a tender devotion for the Saints and Angels—the fruits and ministers of the Incarnation. He had also a special love for the festival of Christmas. He called it "the feast of feasts" and wished characteristically that corn could be spread along the roads on that day so that the birds "especially our brothers, the larks," might enter into Christmas joy. (42) M. Sabatier vividly describes (p. 285) the joy with which St. Francis celebrated the feast of Christmas in the woods at Greccio. But for one who reads the mind of St. Francis so often it seems strange that M. Sabatier should not have traced the Saint's actions on this occasion to their source and pointed out the motives underlying them. Did he fear lest they might be based on a steadfast faith in the Divinity of Christ? We do not know but this much is certain—take away from St. Francis this faith in the Incarnation and the melody of his life is utterly destroyed. What wonder then if a note of discord predominates in M. Sabatier's book. Of all men a Liberal Protestant, since he denies Jesus Christ was God Incarnate, can least understand St. Francis.

Rationalism, like all narrowing influences, closes the eyes to much truth. Hence there are other aspects of the

(41) 1 *Cel.*, p. 97.

(42) 1 *Cel.*, cap. X, 85, 86, 87.

Saint's life which wholly escape M. Sabatier. Nothing is told us of his spirit of prayer (43) or of the various means by which he trained himself in the acquisition of those supernatural virtues that should ensure not the spirit of poverty alone, but also the spirit of chastity and above all that of obedience. For St. Francis obedience was the basis of the whole religious life. (44) "What case," he asks, "is more hopeless than that of a religious who doth neglect and despise his obedience?" (45) But M. Sabatier, who is convinced that man's conscience is to have no other guide but self, entirely fails to understand St. Francis' spirit of obedience. Hence, commenting on some passages of the Saint's work which insist on the full and blind obedience of the inferior to the superior, of the layman to the priest, of the priest to Pope, he assures us that these represent "moments of exhaustion in which inspiration was silent" (p. 260). Referring in particular to a text where the truly obedient religious is compared to a corpse (46) Sabatier says (p. 261), "this longing for corpse-like obedience witnesses to the ravages with which his soul had been laid waste. It corresponds in the moral domain to the cry for annihilation of great physical anguish." "It would be superfluous," he adds (p. 262), "to pause over other admonitions. For the most part they are reflections inspired by circumstances." Verily *superfluous* and *circumstances* are convenient words. Their use here affords an interesting example of the absolute serenity

(43) "It was more than a man praying," says Celano, "it was prayer itself."—2 *Cel.*, 197.

(44) 1 *Cel.*, xvii.

(45) *Spec.*, xlix.

(46) *Verum describens obedientem sub figura corporis mortui respondit* (II *Cel.* III, cap. xcix) *Spec.* xxix, 6, *Conform.*, 176.

with which the "higher criticism" disposes of anything that savors of the supernatural as being really "not worth while."

His treatment of the Saint's spirit of penance is also interesting as further illustrating M. Sabatier's point of view. "It would not be difficult, he avers (p. 41), "to find acts and words of his which recall the contempt for matter of the Cathari, for example, his way of treating his body." Anyone acquainted with the abominable doctrines of the Cathari will realize what a gross slur such a comparison implies upon the holiness of St. Francis. But let that pass. St. Bonaventure likens the Saint's body to the court of the Temple. In this court there was a perpetual sacrifice. Alluding to these austerities of the Saint, M. Sabatier ascribes them to the "spirit of evil that now and then reappears in him." Some of his counsels to the friars on this head (p. 41) are spoken of as "momentary but inevitable obscurations, moments of forgetfulness, of discouragement when a man is not himself and repeats mechanically what he hears around him. The real St. Francis is, on the contrary, the lover of nature; he who sees in the whole creation the work of Divine Goodness," etc., as if a man could not at the same time practice mortification and be an admirer of the beauties of nature! But after all there are heights which even the "higher criticism" cannot attain (47), and M. Sabatier could hardly be expected to understand what a chivalrous love, so to say, was that which St. Francis showed for humiliation and self-abnegation. For, as Canon Rawsley remarked in his address at Assisi (48),

(47) "*Non medullam attingunt sed corticem rodunt.*" Leo XIII, Ency. *Provo.*, No. 18, 1893.

(48) At the inauguration of the International Society of Franciscan Studies, June, 1902.

"of that deep central humbleness of heart which underlay everything which St. Francis did the fountain head is hid with Christ in God, and none can find it rising up within their hearts to cleanse and refresh them, save those who will go to the same well St. Francis went to daily and kneel and drink." This is well said, and as Shakespeare's grave digger remarked, "the p'int of it is in the application of it." But this by the way.

So much for M. Sabatier's treatment of St. Francis as an "inner man." Let us see what he has to say as to his "wonder working." "All that is magic and miracle-working," he avers (p. 192), "occupies in his life an entirely secondary rank." (49) It is interesting to note how M. Sabatier brackets *magic and miracle working* together, just as elsewhere, speaking of the poverty of the early Franciscans, he says (p. 127), that it had in it "nothing *ascetic* or *barbarous*"—as if these words were also correlative terms. In his desire to emphasize what he calls (p. 192) the "almost complete absence of the marvellous in the life of St. Francis, M. Sabatier resorts to his favorite device—antithesis—and holds up St. Antony of Padua by way of contrast to St. Francis as a horrible example of the vulgar art of miracle working. Indeed, M. Sabatier is quite out of patience with St. Antony, because the gentle thaumaturgist's life was literally "hung with miracles," to use Cardinal Newman's fine phrase. But we fear that St. Anthony will go on working miracles in spite of M. Sabatier. It is a way he has. The French critic is also not a little scandalized because St. Bonaventure was narrow enough to believe

(49) Elsewhere he avers that the Saint's life "was not a chaplet of virtues or of miracles like the lives of other saints."—*Contemporary Review*, Dec., 1902.

that St. Francis really had visions, and he accuses the Seraphic Doctor (p. 89) of having robbed St. Francis' sanctity "of its choicest blossoms" in picturing "the greater number of his important resolutions as taken in consequence of dreams." The Saint's visions at St. Damian's are spoken of as so many hallucinations; other incidents in St. Francis' life which take on a supernatural tinge, are explained away (p. 314), on the ground that "the imaginations of those who surrounded him were extraordinarily overheated," while St. Francis' belief in the existence of a personal devil is accounted for (p. 190) by the superstitious tendency of his times. Elsewhere (p. 130) M. Sabatier speaks of the transformation of ordinary facts into miracles by the Saint's biographers.

It may be true that some of the miracles attributed to St. Francis are legendary but others such for instance as the curing of the crippled boy at Tuscanella and other similar acts come to us on such high authority that even the Saint's Protestant biographers do not hesitate to accept them. (50) But we are quite ready for the sake of argument to forget the miracles worked by St. Francis and to concede that a St. Francis without visions and miracles might still be a popular hero, an initiator, a great reformer, but he would no longer be the St. Francis of history. And history obliges us to depict St. Francis such as contemporary documents represent him and not according to that superstitious temper which dislikes the idea of Divine "interference." As it is, M. Sabatier's St. Francis, however attractive a person, is no true saint but a merely natural good man in whom the supernatural is no living source of the spiritual life,

(50) See Canon Knox-Little's biography, p. 246.

and yet as Father Cuthbert points out, (51) "the real value of St. Francis' life comes from the fact that his whole life was one harmonious melody; the natural and supernatural being most intimately blended." Even Renan confesses (52) that the life of St. Francis is wholly imbued with the supernatural. The life of St. Francis was moreover a living protest against a certain tendency to exalt the natural virtues at the expense of the supernatural. "An ascetic who carried the practice of the supernatural virtues to the highest degree," says his latest biographer, (53) "his supernaturalism produced its normal fruit in an efflorescence of social virtues which found practical expression in his numerous works for the betterment of humanity."

M. Sabatier is enthusiastic over these "social virtues," but failing to grasp the meritorious and spiritual principle behind them he seeks in vain to portray the ideal of St. Francis. It would seem that poverty is the one idea that St. Francis has impressed on the mind of M. Sabatier. To him St. Francis is above all things the preacher of poverty. The Saint's life "was the simplest but at the same time the most powerful realization of a unique principle—the principle of poverty." If it be true that as between obedience, chastity and poverty, St. Francis was so especially enamoured of the last as to make it the special characteristic of the Order he founded he did not

(51) "Franciscan Studies," by Father Cuthbert, O.S.F.C., in the London *Tablet*, Jan. 24, 1903. We have borrowed Father Cuthbert's line of thought in more than one place.

(52) *Nouvelles Etudes*, d'histoire religieuse. Paris, 1884, p. 327.

(53) Fr. Leopold de Cherancé—St. Francis of Assisi. Third English Edition, translated by R. F. O'Connor. (London: Burns & Oates, 1901.)

thereby seek to make of poverty the noblest of virtues as M. Sabatier appears to believe. He could not do so for the virtue of obedience stands first and after it comes chastity. (54) This is the order in which they stand in the Rule of the Friars Minor. (Chap. 1) M. Sabatier seems to think that the mere giving up of all the world holds dear is by itself sufficient to constitute the following of Christ. The fact is that poverty has no value in itself but derives all its merit and beauty from its being practiced for the love of God. If it be built on pride or ministers to pride it is not good but evil. For St. Francis poverty was the chosen virtue of our Lord and of His Holy Mother, and therefore it had become the queen of all other virtues. With these sentiments Francis spoke from the fulness of his heart whenever the subject turned upon his "Lady Poverty" whom he had espoused forever. By these mystical nuptials St. Francis sought and found an extra means of quickening that life of the spirit in which the riddle of the world is solved. But wedded as St. Francis was to his Lady Poverty, his love for the Holy Eucharist was greater still.

At the Convent of the *Celles*, near Cortona, there is a little church standing just as it was in the time of St. Francis. Everything breathes the most absolute poverty, but the door of the tabernacle is of pure gold. Such was his devotion to the Blessed Sacrament that for It he forgot his beloved poverty. (55) He gave orders that a certain number of the Friars should go about the world carrying precious *ciboria*. (56) They were to

(54) This is pointed out by Dr. Mooney in his excellent article on St. Francis in the *N. Y. Times*, Apr. 18, 1903.

(55) P. Teofilo Dominichelli, O.F.M. "*L'indole di S. Francesco*, 1898.

(56) II *Cel.* III, cxxix.

leave one at every church where they found that "the Prisoner of the Tabernacle" was not reposing in a vessel worthy of Him. Fearing that hosts might be wanted for the celebration of the Most Holy Sacrifice, or that they might not be carefully prepared, he used to make great numbers himself and carry them to the churches that required them. In most of his missions he carried a mould with which he fashioned these hosts. Some of these moulds were formerly to be seen at the Convent of Greccio. We have spoken of St. Francis' devotion to the Passion. He who loves the cross must love the altar; there is the same Host, the same Sacrifice. It was one of St. Francis' maxims that not to hear Mass every day if one can is a mark of ingratitude and contempt. He usually heard two whenever his occupations permitted it. Nor was the union of St. Francis with the Divine Victim merely an external one. He communicated frequently, (57) Celano (II, cxxix) tells us, and "so devoutly as to move others to devotion." These are facts, however, upon which, as might be expected, M. Sabatier does not care to dwell. He prefers to linger over the Saint's charity towards the leper and outcast. But the same charity which made St. Francis restore hope to the leper and the outcast made him also rekindle enthusiasm among the clergy by restoring their churches. And if it be true that one of the chief works of the friars was the restoration of the churches, it is no less true that a still greater work of theirs was the restoration of the Eucharistic devotion.

But on this aspect of the work of the friars M. Saba-

(57 "Frequently" is, of course, a relative term, and must be interpreted by the practice of St. Francis' time. See "The Holy Communion," by Father Dalgairns, p. 223.

tier is eloquently silent. Of course he knows better than to suppose that it was simply for the sake of cleanliness that St. Francis used to sweep out the churches he visited or that it was mere love of building that made him so anxious to restore the dilapidated Church of St. Damian. M. Sabatier realizes that in doing these things St. Francis was actuated by the same motive as when he addressed a letter to the clergy (58) in which with words of fire he conjures them to show every possible reverence to the mystery of Divine Love. But this motive was a supernatural one—based on belief in the Real Presence and M. Sabatier knows that next to the Pope's supremacy there is no belief so distinctively "Roman" as that of the Real Presence and so he relegates the whole question to a foot-note (p. 327). The artist, a German critic tells us, is known by what he *omits* and you may trust M. Sabatier to omit whatever does not square with his thesis—which calls for the exclusion of all that is sacramental.

It is doubtless for the same reason that the beautiful story of how St. Francis healed the leper has been so ruthlessly mutilated. It is recorded by the ancient chronicler that after being completely healed in body the leper "*confessed all his sins to a priest.*" Then "as it pleased God the leper healed in body and soul" after "*doing penance for fifteen days* fell sick of another malady and *fortified by the Sacraments of the Church* he died a holy death." (59) M. Sabatier (p. 142), relating this story

(58) This letter is found in the Assisi MS. 338 fo. 31b, 32b, with the title, *De reverentia Corporis Domini et de munditia altaris ad omnes clericos.*

(59) This story is given by the Conformities, 174b, 2, as taken from the *Legenda Antiqua*. It also occurs in the *Spec.* 566 and the *Fioretti*, ch. 24. We have quoted from the English version

which he accepts as historically true, omits the conclusion altogether. We merely cite this as an instance of how M. Sabatier uses documents only in so far as they serve his end which in this instance is to show St. Francis' love for these unfortunates and his method with them.

As an example of how he puts his own interpretation on the testimony of silence and passes over direct evidence we have M. Sabatier's description of the Saint's deathbed. "There," he says (p. 343), "in the poor cabin, without altar and without a priest was celebrated the Lord's Supper." It is thus he describes the touching action of St. Francis, who, believing it was Thursday evening and desiring, after the example of Christ, to take a last meal with his disciples, sent for some bread and blessed it and broke it and gave a piece to each. (60) If M. Sabatier likes to call this the "Lord's Supper" he may, but he cannot thereby transform it into the Protestant Communion service; as Canon Knox-Little points out (p. 270) it was nothing more than "a sort of *pain beni*" such as is distributed on certain feast days in Catholic countries. For the rest, if our uniform actions have an opposite tenency to those of the Middle Ages, when the language of action was often used owing to the instinctive taste for the picturesque, that should not permit us to misrepresent those who have preceded us. Moreover, about the Saint's deathbed were gathered, not only the

of the *Fioretti*, published in London by Kegan Paul, 1899, and based upon the translation issued by the Franciscan Friars at Upton. Another English edition was published by Burns & Oates, London, 1887, with a preface by Cardinal Manning. A newer translation is that issued by J. M. Dent, London, 1899, being a volume of the Temple Classics.

(60) This touching example given by St. Francis was imitated in the order. See the Life of Blessed Louise of Savoy.

ill-starred Brother Elias and the Lady Jacqueline of Settisoli, but also some of his first companions and among them Brother Leo, who was not only a priest but also the Saint's confessor, and Canon Knox-Little distinctly states (p. 270), that "St. Francis had received the last sacraments." There is another incident connected with the Saint's last days which is *not* recorded by M. Sabatier. When he felt his end approaching, St. Francis sent for Brother Benedict, "a holy and prudent priest who sometimes celebrated for Bl. Francis when he lay ill, for *whenever he could he always wished to hear Mass, no matter how unwell he might be*" (Spec.v.87), to whom he said: ". . . Write down the blessing I now give to all my brothers in the Order. Let them be ever faithful and submissive to the *Prelates and Priests of Holy Mother Church,*" etc. This too, after the "disillusion" of which Sabatier speaks. A complete biography should have included this incident but its insertion in Sabatier's book might have spoiled the climax of his thesis. Truly it is no easy task to carry a thesis and write a biography at the same time. One more illustration will suffice to confirm this fact.

It was late in the evening of October 3, 1226, that St. Francis breathed his last, praising God to the end, (61) and with his songs were mingled those of the little birds he loved so well, for we are told that a great multitude of larks—birds of the light and of the morning—"came above the roof of the house wherein he lay, and, flying a little way off, did make a wheel after the manner of a circle round the roof, and by their sweet singing did seem to be praising the Lord along with him." (62) So

(61) "*Mortem cantando suscepit,*" II *Cel.* c. xxxix.

(62) *Spec.*, cxiii.

tyrannical is M. Sabatier's thesis that it must break into the harmonies of the Saint's deathbed by distorting this touching incident. He calls it (p. 344) "the canonization of which he (St. Francis) was most worthy, the only one, doubtless, which he would have coveted." If, as we fear, M. Sabatier means by this conclusion to attribute any other motive to St. Francis than that of humility he is attributing to the Saint quite gratuitously a feeling which he never had. The most extreme Ultramontane could not be more devout to the saints than St. Francis. One day at Monte Casale, in the province of Massa, he enjoined the friars of the convent in that town to go and search for relics in an abandoned church. "I have long suffered," he said, "from seeing those sacred bones deprived of the honor due to them. You must bring them to the chapel of your convent with all the respect you can." (63)

This incident is not recorded in M. Sabatier's *Life*. We likewise search in vain for any mention of those specific instructions which St. Francis left behind with regard to particular practices. These instructions which refer to such distinctively Catholic practices as fasting, sacramental confession and prayer for the dead, etc., are the more valuable since they prove—if proof were needed—that St. Francis' beliefs were positive and decided beliefs, unlike those of his modern admirers, which vary "with every wind of doctrine." (64) But St. Francis' orthodoxy is not on trial. It is the accuracy of his biographer. And it is especially with regard to St. Francis' attitude towards the Papacy that M. Sabatier seems to be most completely mistaken.

FR. PASCHAL ROBINSON, O.F.M.,

(63) II *Ccl.*, cxxx.

(64) *Ephes.* iv, 14.

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